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ND Students Among Nation's Best On GED Exams

BISMARCK, N.D., Feb. 11, 2016 – School Superintendent Kirsten Baesler said Thursday that North Dakota students recorded one of the nation's highest success rates last year on the General Educational Development battery of tests.

The GED is taken by people who are at least 16 years old who have left high school without graduating. The exam consists of four tests that measure proficiency in reading, mathematics, science and social studies. It is accepted as the equivalent of a high school diploma by employers and higher education institutions.

North Dakota students recorded a 90 percent success rate on their GED exams in 2015, which ranked second in the nation, behind Arkansas. In all, 837 North Dakota students took the exams last year. The national average GED pass rate for 2015 was 67 percent.

In 2014, 588 North Dakota students took the GED tests, and registered a pass rate of 75 percent, compared with the national average of 67 percent. North Dakota's 75 percent pass rate in 2014 ranked sixth in the nation, behind Arkansas, Kentucky, Hawaii, Oregon and Vermont.

North Dakota's 2015 GED pass rate is expected to rise even higher because of a national, retroactive change in the passing score for the four exams, Baesler said. Initially, GED test takers needed a 150 score on each test to pass. However, the "cut score" was lowered last month to 145.

The minimum score was reduced after an analysis of 18 months' worth of test data in several states, which showed that students who scored 150 or better on the tests were doing better in college than a large minority of high school graduates. (The maximum GED score is 200.)

In North Dakota, the reduced score will be applied retroactively to GED test-takers who sat for the exam last year, said Valerie Fischer, director of adult education for the state Department of Public Instruction. As a result, about 100 test-takers who believed they had not passed the exam will be notified that they did, Fischer said.

The GED test was recently overhauled to conform to more rigorous academic standards adopted in North Dakota. The new exam made its debut in January 2014. It was designed to be more challenging, and to measure a student's ability to think critically and use his or her knowledge to solve real-world problems.

The GED is administered by the GED Testing Service, a joint venture of the nonprofit American Council on Education, which represents U.S. colleges and universities and related education groups, and Pearson, an education testing, publishing and software company. It is offered in 40 states and the District of Columbia.

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